THE WORLD.

NUMBER CLXVI.

By *ADAM FITZ-ADAM.*

To be continued every THURSDAY.

THURSDAY, *March* the 4th, 1756.

Falſus honor juvat, & mendax infamia terret,
Quem, niſi mendacem, & mendoſum?

To Mr. FITZ-ADAM,

SIR,

AMONG all the proſtitutions of language, ſo juſtly obſerved by many celebrated writers, I know of none more to be lamented, than thoſe which rob virtue of her true title, and uſurp her name and character.

IT may be obſerved, that in all countries and ſtates, the farther they have gone from their original purity and ſimplicity, the greater have their advances been in this reſpect. The Romans, whoſe poverty only kept them within the bounds of virtue, when they had quitted their humble ſtation for ſcenes of ambition and glory, not only changed their manners, but loſt the ſenſe of thoſe words, which were in high eſtimation with their anceſtors. The words *frugal, temperate* and *modeſt*, were no longer held in any degree of reverence, when riches and a licentious enjoyment of them, were the only things in vogue.

WE

WE have gone beyond them in this reſpect, and quite reverſed the meaning of words. *Knave* and *villain*, formerly the denominations of laudable induſtry, are now the marks of the greateſt reproach. Our manners have adulterated our words; and for fear they ſhould reproach us with our conduct, we disfranchiſe and condemn them to infamy, that their teſtimony may be invalid, and their evidence of no credit.

THERE are many inſtances in modern times, where a falſe and blind zeal has heightened the ſignification of words of very little meaning, to an unaccountable degree of veneration; as on the contrary, a looſe and libertine way of thinking has debaſed and ſullied thoſe of the higheſt dignity.

I AM not a little pleaſed with a ſaying of king Theodorick, who being adviſed by his courtiers to debaſe the coin, declared, "That nothing which bore his image, "ſhould ever lie." Are we not all acceſſary to the propagation of falſhood, when we ſuffer any thing that carries the image and repreſentation of our minds, to be guilty of an untruth; and when we enter into a combination, to ſupport words in a ſignification, foreign to their meaning, and quite different from the ideas, thoſe ſounds ought to form in our minds?

CUSTOM is the tyrant of language; it can alter, adjuſt and new model, but it cannot annihilate. It can ſettle new phraſes, introduce a whole colony of faſhionable nonſenſe from foreign parts, and render old words obſolete; but it cannot eraſe idea from language. It can do more than an abſolute prince; becauſe it can create new words; a privilege which was not allowed to the Roman emperor Tiberias, who having coined a word in the ſenate, his flatterers deſired it might be adopted into their language, as a compliment to the emperor; but an old ſenator, not quite degenerated from the honeſt ſincerity of his anceſtors, made this memorable reply, "You "may give, ſir, the freedom of the city to *men*, but "not to *words*."

THERE is no word of greater import and dignity than HONOUR. It is virtue, adorned with every decoration, that

that can make it amiable and uſeful in ſociety. It is the true foundation of mutual faith and credit, and the real intercourſe, by which the buſineſs of life is tranſacted with ſafety and pleaſure. It is of univerſal extent, and can be confined to no particular ſtation of life, becauſe it is every man's ſecurity, and every man's intereſt. But to it's great misfortune, it's own virtues have undone it. It's excellent character has of late years recommended it ſo much to the patronage of the Great, that they have entirely appropriated it to their own uſe, and communicated to it a part of their own privileges, that of being acceſſible only to a few. It now no longer retains it's former good qualities; it's real dignity is loſt, and it is become rather the ornament, than the foundation of a character: it is a kind of poliſh, that implies a finiſhed character, and too often conceals a very imperfect one.

THUS has HONOUR got an imaginary title, inſtead of a real one. It has loſt by it's acquiſitions; and by being the particular idol of a few, is no longer of uſe to the many. It's new acquired trophies, are the ſpoils of it's former greatneſs; and the remembrance of what it was, ſerves only to heighten the melancholy idea of what it now is. It formerly conſtantly attended merit, as a friend and guardian; it now accompanies greatneſs, as a flatterer and paraſite.

IT is a compliment to the taſte of the preſent age, to alledge that HONOUR is it's darling attribute. It is in itſelf a compoſition of every thing that is valuable and worthy of commendation; and even in it's preſent degenerate ſtate, it is, in a degree, the picture of VIRTUE: it is finely drawn, but the lines are not juſt, and the colours too glaring. The endeavours of the artiſts to ſet it off to advantage, have made it more like a piece of gaudy pageantry, than a true copy of nature.

To juſtify the truth of what I aſſert, I appeal to you, Mr. Fitz-Adam, and beg leave to aſk you, what are your ideas of a man, when you hear him particularly recommended as a man of HONOUR? Are your notions at all enlarged, in reſpect to his moral character? Would you give him the preference in your vote, as a repreſentative of his country in parliament? Or ſhould you conceive

ceive him to have a more than ordinary zeal for the true religion of his country? Would you truſt him the ſooner, were you a tradeſman? or could you with more ſafety admit him into your family, to an intimacy with your wife or daughters? You would undoubtedly rather game with him, becauſe he will not cheat; and you would be ſure to receive your money, if you gained any advantage, however his more juſt creditors might ſuffer. You would certainly ſhew him more reſpect, becauſe you dare not affront him; HONOUR being a thing of ſo very delicate a nature, that the leaſt indignity endangers it's deſtruction: having loſt it's true eſſence, it can only be ſupported by the courage and zeal of thoſe, who will not ſuffer it's title to be diſputed.

WHAT is become of poor HONESTY? Is ſhe confined to the habitations of Mark and Mincing lane? Dare ſhe not appear in the polite world? I make no doubt ſhe is as frequent in her viſits there, as in any other place; but for want of a proper dreſs, ſhe is obliged to be in cog. She is not a little afraid of the pert raillery of HONOUR, whom ſhe would be ſure to meet in her travels to thoſe parts of the town; and as the latter is a burleſque on her character, ſhe chuſes always to avoid her.

HER name ſeems to be quite baniſhed to the unbred world, and is ſo much out of vogue at preſent, that an HONEST MAN, as certainly means a tradeſman, as a MAN of HONOUR does a gentleman.

THE word is fairly worn out: it has been ſo long in mercantile hands, that it is no longer fit for gentlemen. They have laid it aſide by univerſal conſent, and beſtowed it, with their old clothes, on their ſervants and dependants.

THE ladies, who form the moſt conſiderable part of the faſhionable world, have a peculiar ſort of HONOUR of their own. They entrench not upon that, already appropriated to the other ſex, but take it where the men leave it. Conſcious of their own frailties and infirmities, they are not aſhamed to invoke it's aid and aſſiſtance, to guard them in a part, where they imagine they are moſt liable to a ſurprize. No other branch of their conduct, comes within the juriſdiction of HONOUR (for HONOUR at preſent,

preſent, is no more than what the world expects from you) they are at free liberty in every other article; and, like our original parents, have but one thing prohibited.

THE different value and credit of particular virtues, at ſeveral periods of time, would form a very entertaining and uſeful hiſtory; and by looking back into former times, and obſerving the different faces and changes that virtue has appeared in, we might reduce it to a degree of calculation, and form a tolerable conjecture when any particular ſpecies of it would again come into faſhion. The preſent rage for liberty, will not eaſily admit of many articles of belief; they are a degree of ſervitude of the mind, which we diſdain: but as it is very proper to obſerve ſome appearance of religion, we voluntarily give up the freedom of the body, to preſerve that of the mind; and admit of ſome regulations and reſtrictions, which cuſtom has eſtabliſhed as indiſpenſably neceſſary to maintain the connections of ſocial life.

BUT the body is full as rebellious as the mind, and has as ſtrong an averſion to reſtraint; for which reaſon, it has been found expedient to grant ſome degree of indulgence, to moderate between pleaſure and ſtrict virtue, and to make a compromize between the ſeverer duties, and moſt prevailing paſſions.

To form this alliance, and ſtrengthen it by the firmeſt tie, the word HONOUR was introduced; a word very much the favourite of virtue, and ſo enchanting in it's ſound, that vice could make no objection. She conſented; but on theſe conditions, that ſhe ſhould have a due proportion of advantage; and if it was allowed to heighten many virtues, it ſhould likewiſe be permitted to cover almoſt an equal degree of vice. Thus it is made to ſerve both as a cordial and palliative: it exalts the character of virtue, and takes off from the deformity of vice. But the mixture is ſo unnatural, that the poiſon gets the better of the medicine; and if ſome ſtrong antidote is not ſpeedily applied, all the humours will be vitiated, and the whole maſs corrupted.